

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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STUDY OF OSPREYS TO BE MADE THIS SPRING

The Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service and Maryland's Department of Natural Resources are cooperating this spring in an aerial survey of the population of nesting ospreys and the bird's success in raising young in the Chesapeake Bay area.

"Good information on this species has been lacking," says Assistant Secretary Nathaniel Reed, who heads Interior's programs for fish, wildlife, and parks. Ospreys, also known as fish hawks, are believed in trouble in some areas because of pesticides and other contaminants, but are not presently classified by the Federal Government as "endangered."

Two complete surveys will be made. The first, which began in late April, attempts to locate nests and record the number of nesting pairs. The second survey, to learn the number of young produced, is scheduled for late June.

"Repetition of these surveys in following years will provide an excellent picture of the status of the fish hawk and will tell us much about the health of Chesapeake Bay," Secretary Reed said.

During the studies, four aircraft capable of flying as low as 200 feet will be used, each carrying a trained observer in addition to the pilot.

The osprey is found on all continents, with the American variety ranging from northwestern Alaska to southern Chile on the Pacific coast and from Newfoundland and central Quebec to Argentina on the Atlantic coast.

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A colony near the mouth of the polluted Connecticut River has declined from 150 to a single nesting pair in the last 20 years.

The species is vulnerable primarily because it is at the top of the food chain. It consumes fish that in turn have accumulated pesticides and other pollutants from the aquatic habitat.

Ospreys usually nest near water and are at home on fresh water or by the sea. Nests generally are constructed in high trees, but sometimes on rocks or on ground.

Nests are used year after year by the same or different pairs, and grow larger each season with an added assortment of sticks, branches, and often paper or other debris. Nests may come to weigh several hundred pounds and have been known to reach half a ton.

